

# The Greeks - Makers of the World Wonders

By Vickie Chao

Have you ever heard of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World? A Greek writer and poet by the name of Antipater of Sidon was the first person to conceive that idea, some time during the 2nd century B.C. His selections were probably based on the popular tourist spots of his days. Of the seven monuments that made it to the list that we know today (which may not be the same as Antipater's original list), five of them were closely linked to the same civilization -- Greece. Together, they showcased what a magnificent culture the Greeks had at the time.

The first of the quintuplets was the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, Turkey. In 550 B.C., Croesus, the king of Lydia, commissioned architect Chersiphron to design a temple for the Greek goddess of hunting. As a show of his respect toward the deity, the king spared no expense. The entire building, made of marble, was an instant hit, attracting admirers from all corners to come and worship Artemis. The temple had a rectangular base, about 350 feet long and 180 feet wide. All around it were 127 Ionic-styled columns. Each towered 60 feet in height. Sadly, on July 21, 356 B.C., a madman named Herostratus set fire to the temple and burned it down. Later, when asked why he had committed such a horrible crime, Herostratus said that he wanted to become famous by whatever means possible. Well, he certainly got his wish! Interestingly, on the very night that the Temple of Artemis was torched, Alexander the Great was born. Plutarch, a Greek historian, wrote that Artemis was too busy that day with Alexander's delivery to save her own burning temple. At one point, Alexander offered to pay for the reconstruction. But the Ephesians turned it down. They did not restore the temple until after Alexander died in 323 B.C. During a raid in 262 A.D., the Goths sacked Ephesus and destroyed the Temple of Artemis. This time, it was gone forever!



The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (present-day Bodrum, Turkey) was a tomb for Mausolus (also spelled as Mausollus). Mausolus was the de-facto ruler of Caria, though he technically was a mere satrap (governor) who was required to answer to the Persian king. His reign over Caria, from 377 B.C. to 353 B.C., was rather unremarkable. The only matter worthy of note was the construction of his tomb. This particular project -- conceived by Artemisia, his sister and wife -- probably began some time before Mausolus passed away. To make her husband's final resting place as grand as possible, Artemisia hired the most talented architects from Greece to lead the task. When the construction was done in 350 B.C., it featured a white marble building standing up to 140 feet. The entire structure had four main sections. The base platform, where Mausolus' tomb sat, was 60 feet tall. On top of that, there were thirty-six columns, each measuring 38-feet in height. Above the colonnade was a giant 22-foot stepped pyramid, followed by a 20-foot chariot statue bearing Mausolus and Artemisia's images. A fine collection of statues, all made by the finest Greek sculptors of Artemisia's days, dotted the complex. This splendid building perched atop a hill and overlooked Halicarnassus for nearly sixteen centuries. During that long period, the city itself changed hands many times over. Yet, amazingly, no harm ever came to the mausoleum. The building was eventually reduced to rubble by a series of massive earthquakes. Later, the locals reused most of its remains for their own construction projects. They never rebuilt it.

The Statue of Zeus at Olympia was a masterpiece designed and sculptured by Pheidias around 430 B.C. It featured the Greek king of all gods and goddess sitting on a throne. The statue, housed inside a rather plain Doric-styled temple, was adorned with ivory, gold, ebony, and precious stones. In Zeus' right hand was a statue of Nike (the goddess of victory), and in his left hand was a shining scepter on which an eagle was perched. When the Romans first gained full control of Greece in 146 B.C., they were quite tolerant toward the local culture. But that lax attitude changed toward the end of the 4th century A.D. After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Romans banned all pagan practices. Among the various things they did, they banned the Olympic Games, a sporting event that the Greeks had held at Olympia since 776 B.C. to honor Zeus. They shut down the temple. And they took the 40-foot-tall Statue of Zeus to the capital of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire, Constantinople (modern day Istanbul, Turkey). Merely five decades later, around 462 A.D., a fire engulfed the city and destroyed the statue.

In the 4th century B.C., after Alexander the Great died, his mighty Macedonian Empire was falling apart. His once loyal generals all had their own agendas and sought to take a piece of the kingdom for themselves. Ptolemy I Soter, for example, quickly strengthened his position in Egypt and established a new dynasty there. At the time, he held a close tie with the Greeks who were living on the island of Rhodes. The alliance between Egypt and Rhodes caught the eye of Soter's enemy and another Macedonian general, Antigonus I Monophthalmus. In 305 B.C., Monophthalmus sent his son, Demetrius, to invade Rhodes and place it under siege. After nearly one year of standoff, Demetrius had yet to make any significant progress and grew increasingly frustrated. When he saw Soter's relief force approaching Rhodes in 304 B.C., he quickly withdrew his troops and left behind most of his military equipment. To celebrate the victory, the Rhodians decided to build a giant statue of their patron sun god, Helios. It was said that the project, sculptured by Chares, took 12 years to complete, from 294 B.C. to 282 B.C. The entire cost was financed by the proceeds from the sale of Demetrius' equipment. This 110-foot-tall bronze monument stood imposingly nearby a harbor. But its glory turned out to be very short-lived. In about 226 B.C., an earthquake struck Rhodes and toppled the structure. When the Egyptian ruler, Ptolemy III (Soter's son), heard of the disaster, he offered to pay for the reconstruction. But the Rhodians declined on the grounds that they had consulted an oracle earlier and become convinced that the statue had offended Helios. For the next 800 years or so, the Colossus of Rhodes lay broken in ruins. Then, in 654 A.D., the Arabs invaded Rhodes. They disassembled the remains of the statue and sold the pieces for scrap. Supposedly, they needed 900 camels to load all the fragments.

The Lighthouse of Alexandria was commissioned by Ptolemy I Soter, who ruled Egypt from 323 B.C. to 285 B.C. The construction probably began around 290 B.C. but did not get finished before Soter passed away. It was unveiled to the public ten years later, in 280 B.C., during the reign of Ptolemy III. The lighthouse stood on the island of Pharos, off the coast of Alexandria. Almost 400 feet tall, the structure was made up of three stages. The lowest was square, the middle octagonal, and the top cylindrical. For centuries, the Lighthouse of Alexandria guided ships in and out of this coastal city. But that service came to an abrupt end when two massive earthquakes in the 14th century severely damaged it. In 1480 A.D., the Egyptian sultan, Qaitbay, used the ruins of the lighthouse to build a medieval fort on the same spot where the building once stood. Any hope to rebuild the lighthouse was dashed completely.

Today, the Temple of Artemis, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the Statue of Zeus, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the Lighthouse of Alexandria are all gone. In fact, of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, six of them disappeared a long time ago. The other ill-fated monument was the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. The only surviving structure of the group, which happens to be the oldest as well, is the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt!

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## Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Which of the following about the Temple of Artemis is correct?
- A. It was located at the site where the first Olympic Games were held.
  - B. It was a rectangular building, surrounded by 127 columns.
  - C. It was dedicated to the sun god, Helios.
  - D. It was never rebuilt after Herostratus burned it to the ground.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Which of the following about the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus is correct?
- A. It was taller than the Colossus of Rhodes.
  - B. It was situated in a valley.
  - C. The Arabs burned it down in 654 A.D.
  - D. It was the final resting place for Ptolemy I Soter.

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Which of the following about the Statue of Zeus is correct?
- A. It featured a shining scepter in Zeus' right hand.
  - B. The Romans destroyed it when they shut down the temple where the Statue of Zeus resided.
  - C. It stood imposingly nearby a harbor on the island of Rhodes.
  - D. It featured Zeus sitting on a throne.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Which of the following about the Colossus of Rhodes is correct?
- A. Alexander the Great built it in 282 B.C.
  - B. In the 7th century, the Arabs disassembled the statue and sold the pieces for scrap.
  - C. It was a wooden statue adorned with ivory, gold, ebony, and precious stones.
  - D. It was burned down by Herostratus.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Which of the following about the Lighthouse of Alexandria is correct?
- A. It was destroyed by an earthquake in 226 B.C.
  - B. It was built on the island of Pharos.
  - C. Ptolemy III commissioned the project and unveiled it to the public in 280 B.C.
  - D. The middle section of the building was cylindrical.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Which of the following Wonders of the Ancient World was the tallest?
- A. The Temple of Artemis
  - B. The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus
  - C. The Lighthouse of Alexandria
  - D. The Colossus of Rhodes
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Which of the following Wonders of the Ancient World was completed first?
- A. The Colossus of Rhodes
  - B. The Statue of Zeus
  - C. The Lighthouse of Alexandria
  - D. The Temple of Artemis
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Which of the following Wonders of the Ancient World can we still visit today?
- A. The Colossus of Rhodes
  - B. The Hanging Gardens
  - C. The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus
  - D. The Great Pyramid
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Why did the Rhodians NOT rebuild their Colossus of Rhodes?
- A. Because they no longer worshipped Helios
  - B. Because they were broke
  - C. Because they were too lazy
  - D. Because they did not want to offend Helios
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Which of the following statements is correct?
- A. The Colossus of Rhodes was built before the Temple of Artemis.
  - B. The Lighthouse of Alexandria had a cylindrical top.
  - C. Alexander the Great was born on the same night that the Statue of Zeus collapsed.
  - D. The highest portion of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus was a stepped pyramid.



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